

Andrew Jackson to John Sevier, May 8, 1797, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO JOHN SEVIER.¹

¹ Jackson's letters to Sevier of May 8, 10, and 13, 1797, are published in the *Am. Hist. Mag.* (Nashville), V. 118–122. See also Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, I. 57 n.

Nashville, May 8, 1797

Sir: From your friendly communications Recd. whilst I was at Philadelphia, I was convinced you had been rightly informed of the expressions made use of by me at the election of the militia officers of this District with respect to your official conduct in communicating your constitutional power as the Executive of the state to another, and had Truly construed it to be a right as a *citizen* that I possessed, to take notice of any official act, of any officer of Government and express, my sentiments thereon, but sir behold my surprise, when I returned and was informed that amidst those friendly letters to me you had wrote a letter to General Robertson and another to Joel Lewis in which you cared not for any scurelous expression of this language that “ *a poor pitifull petty fogging Lawyer*” could make use of respecting me (you) and that you would treat it with Contempt,” these are expression, that my feelings are not accustomed to, and which my conduct through life by no mea[n]s, merri[s], and with respect to the scurrility, mentioned by you in your letter as having been made use of by me, it will be necessary to state facts and from thence enquire whether the expressions made use of deserv[e]d the epithet, *scurilous* . I was present at the Election as a private Citizen, who I conceived had no right to interfere, as their representative (they officers elected by the people) were present, who were constitutionally, and Legally authorised to conduct, and Debate upon any matter that might arise at the Election,

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and hearing your Constitutional power to transfer any of your official duties to another questioned—was still determined to be silent, but in the course of the Debate seeing Joel Lewis, rise to dispute upon the question, and to enforce his Argument, pulled out a private letter wrote him by you, viewing him as a Citizen in the same situation of myself—without a right to Debate, and viewing with horror a private Letter from the Executive of the State produced to influence the officers, to do, (in my oppinion) an unconstitutional act, and which would establish a precedent, dangerous to the rights of the people, I proceeded to reply, with some warmth to Mr Lewis and observed, (in *substance*) that I was sorry to expose the Ignorance of the governor in attempting to negociate his Constitutional duties, and further observed that it matters not, that the power was granted to a good man, the right being given up, and the presedent being established, that the Executive might Convey the power to any person evan to Tom Mcfarlin if Living, this Sir was the substance of my expressions in reply to Mr Lewis without personal reference to your character further than the law of argument and Mr. Lewiss conduct justified and I must still think that they did not merrit, the epithet *Scurrilous* , but Sir why those private letters wrote why Sir the communication not directly to me, why Sir the friendly correspondence with me of philadelphia, and why Sir this private attack upon my character to a man that was my enemy, with (*I suppose*) instructions to publish it, in my absence; this Conduct requires an explanation, and the injury done my feelings and charector requires a redress,

answer, to this letter sir is expected.

Mr Lewis certainly meant to put himself indecently at the head of a party, and when I saw him produce your Letter to influence unconstitutially an election, in which he ought to have had no concern the first idea that struck me was, that he was authorised so to do by you, otherwise he would not have taken the liberty to produce your Letter. Whether this was the case you alone can determine.